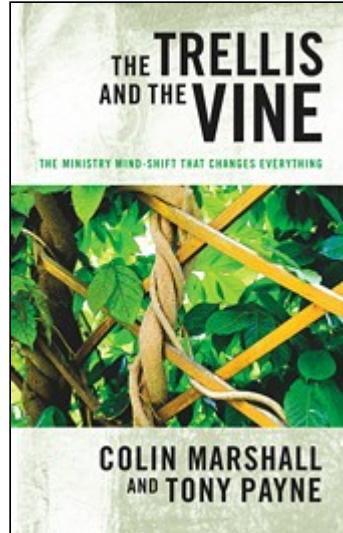


The Briefing

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A spot of gardening

Ian Carmichael (<http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/authors/ian-carmichael/>) | 1 December, 2009



I want to be frank with you, so I'm just going to say it. I don't want any argument, okay? There is nothing—repeat, *nothing*—more boring on television or radio than shows about gardening. If you disagree with me, then I'm sorry, but you just need to be corrected.

There is only one thing more tedious than actually getting out and doing gardening, and that is listening to people phone in and ask for advice about why their vine isn't bearing fruit this season. (To these people, I want to say, "Go to your local fruit shop, my friend. They have lots of fruit there, and it's sure to be cheaper than what you are going to spend on sprays and fertilizers over the next three years while you wait for your vine to 'mature'. Some say you should talk to your plant; I'd suggest you start by telling it to *grow up and stop being churlish.*")

So when I first heard that Matthias Media was thinking about publishing a book called [The Trellis and the Vine](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/tatv/) (<http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/tatv/>) by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, I admit that my eyes glazed over and I had an overwhelming urge to spray weedkiller on the person who came up with that title. But such was my commitment to the cause that when the draft copy of the book was thrust into my hand, despite my misgivings about its overtly horticultural theme, I sat and read it, fully expecting to be comatose by the time I got near the bottom of page 2.

But here's the thing: the title is a surprisingly apt one. The metaphor of a vine and a trellis proves to be a very useful way of describing the difference between:

- the ministry of the word of God, by the power of the Spirit, in the lives of people that sees them converted, changed and made mature in Christ (i.e. the growing of the vine), and
- everything else we do in our churches that (hopefully!) supports the growing of the vine, but that is not actually vine growing work (i.e. the trellis).

As Col and Tony point out in the first chapter, there is a natural tendency for trellis work to take over:

Perhaps it's because trellis work is easier and less personally threatening. Vine work is personal and requires much prayer. It requires us to depend on God, and to open our mouths and speak God's word in some way to another person. By nature (by sinful nature, that is) we shy away from this. (p. 9)

They suggest that there is therefore an urgent need to rethink our attitudes and answer questions like "What is the vine for?", "How does the vine grow?", "How does the vine relate to my church?", "What is vine work, what is trellis work, and how can we tell the difference?", "What part do different people play in growing the vine?", "How can we get more people involved in vine work?" and "What is the right relationship between the trellis and the vine?" The guts of the book explore these very issues, propose biblical answers and provide very practical advice.

I've been involved in Matthias Media since it began in 1988, and for me, this is undoubtedly the most exciting book we've published. It's exciting for three reasons. Firstly, this book articulates clearly and argues persuasively for the understanding of ministry upon which Matthias Media is based. So it was thrilling to be able to say, "Yep, that's what we're labouring away for at Matthias Media—to provide quality resources to help people and churches do *that* sort of ministry".

But secondly, it's exciting because the subtitle makes the bold claim that this book is about "The ministry mind-shift that *changes everything*". Having read the book, I honestly don't think this is an overstatement. My hope and prayer is

that this book will have a deep impact on both individuals and churches, and that it will refocus our attention on the goal and biblical method of ‘making disciples’, not simply maintaining structures.

Thirdly, in God’s providence, it also looks like *The Trellis and the Vine* is going to be an exciting book in terms of the sheer breadth of its distribution. With glowing recommendations from various evangelical leaders (Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, Al Mohler, William Taylor and Matt Chandler, just to name a few), there’s sure to be enormous interest in this book. So making sure that we don’t run out of copies is going to be one of those really nice challenges we will have to face here.

Your challenge is to read it, work out who else you know who needs to read it, get it into their hands as soon as possible, and start talking and praying together about its implications.